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Israel's Peace Plan

A STATEMENT BY
MR. LEVI ESHKOL
Prime Minister of Israel,
in the Knesset, 17 May 1965

Israel Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Jerusalem

The summer term of the final session of the fifth Knesset, which we open today, is also our first meeting in the eighteenth year, the 'Year of Life'* of the State of Israel. Eleven days ago, we celebrated Independence Day with mass rejoicing and State ceremonial, and I cannot refrain from saying a few words about its two main events.

One was the Central Parade of the Israel Defence Forces in Jerusalem, the first of its kind, held in the presence of the entire Diplomatic Corps, and with high-ranking delegations from friendly African States taking part. Apart from the brilliant and symbolic character of the Parade, the entire occasion was a testimony of the vigour of the national covenant of the people and the State with their eternal capital.

The other was the display of the might of the Israel Defence Forces at the march-past which took place in Tel Aviv and was viewed by fourteen thousand tourists. The strength that we showed the world will hearten our people and discourage malicious intent in the mind of the enemy. We all hope that a day will come when it will not be merely our physical power that will be the decisive—and almost the only—guarantee for the preservation of peace. But, until that day of peace comes, we shall do all we can to safeguard our ability to crush any attack on Israel's sovereignty and territory and the founts of its life.

The Arab Diversion Plan

One aspect of this possibility of attack—and I refer to the Arab diversion plan—is worthy of mention. Aside from extreme spokesmen in the Arab camp, there is no one who defends the theft of the sources of our water.

* In Hebrew numeration, eighteen is *Heth-Yod*, which makes the word *Hai*—'alive'.

Let me record the attitude which has been expressed on this question by certain great Powers. On 1 April, 1965, the British Prime Minister, Mr. Harold Wilson, said in the House of Commons: 'Anyone who has been there knows what water means to Israel. The diversion of the water would be a very serious matter.'

Previously, the American standpoint was voiced in conversations and in newspaper statements from authoritative quarters, namely, that the Unified Water Plan is regarded as agreed from the international point of view.

Official spokesmen of the French Government have made it clear on more than one occasion that the sources of water should be justly utilized, for Israel is not departing from the Unified Water Plan and has every right to take her share of the water.

Perhaps it is fitting that I should reaffirm what I have said before: With all our hope that the world, working as one, will be able to isolate those who plot this brazen robbery and to dissuade them from a despicable piece of provocation, the duty of defending the source of our waters falls first and foremost on ourselves.

As for the Lebanese President's visit to France, it will be remembered that a sentence on the sanctity of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all States was included in the joint statement issued by the two Presidents. This is the recognition of an important principle on which depends the maintenance of peace in our area and in the world at large.

Diplomatic Relations with Germany

The last debate on international affairs, in the previous term of the Knesset, revolved around West Germany's proposal to establish full and normal diplomatic relations with Israel. A few days ago, the matter was settled between ourselves and the Government of West Germany. The agreement is the culmination of discussions and negotiations between the Governments, a dialogue that had found expression in parliamentary discussion in both Jerusalem and Bonn.

The history of the negotiations, through its succeeding stages, is fresh enough in our memories for me not to have to go into it now in any detail. In all the subjects round which the negotiations turned, there has been an awakening in German public

opinion: the Statute of Limitations, the German scientists in Egypt, the withholding of normal relations as a sop to Arab blackmail, matters concerning which there had been a stormy reaction in world public opinion and in Jewry.

The proposal to establish normal diplomatic relations came from Chancellor Erhard and his Government.

There has also been progress in other matters on which views have been exchanged. Let me mention, in particular, the stirring of a consciousness that Nazi criminals cannot be allowed to enjoy prescription for their crimes—not, indeed, that what has been done so far in this connection fully meets the ends of justice. And let me refer once again to the burden of the past, with all its horror, which haunts the hearts of our generation and perhaps may haunt the hearts of generations yet unborn—in regard to all that affects relations between the two peoples. The Chancellor of West Germany himself referred to this, too, in his Note.

Normal relations between States are in themselves a matter of course in our days, and the advantages are self-evident. In the present case, they are of particular importance, because the Arabs have been taught the lesson that blackmail engineered from Cairo does not pay. This lesson should also be heeded by Powers and States in West and East. Everybody has seen the States of the Arab League themselves divided on the question. Chancellor Erhard's important step has been well received in the world: it has demonstrated clearly to anyone who required the demonstration that the anti-Israel attitude, which Nasser seeks to force upon all Arabic-speaking lands, is not only maliciously reprehensible but unrealistic.

Voices of Peace in the Arab World

Indeed, the breaches in the Arab front against West Germany, when that State set out to establish relations with Israel, have not been the sole manifestation of a more realistic attitude among the Arabs. Voices have been heard rejecting the idea of war, openly calling for a settlement, for peace, for co-existence. I believe that these are not lonely manifestations. Without giving way to premature optimism, we are entitled to assume that among the Arab public, and even in Arab political leadership, there are still think-

ing men and prominent personages who in their hearts accept the inevitability of co-existence.

It may be taken that any intelligent and responsible person in today's world, who is sensitive to the pulse of it, will reach the conclusion that war solves no problems and can give the nations nothing but suffering and havoc; that we must live with each other as we are, and that the ambition to wipe a nation off the map cannot be realized in modern times. Quite simply—we will not allow it nor the world tolerate it. Any attempt to ignore this fundamental premiss carries in it the seeds of horror and destruction. Recognition of the evil inherent in war will ultimately lead to recognition of the blessings of co-operation between peoples and States.

Israel's Desire for Peace and Co-existence

These two elements—the inevitability and the blessings of peace—are the basis of Israel's fundamental conception, one that has found expression in statements, reactions and proposals throughout the years of our renewed existence as a State. Even before that, our movement of renascence was accompanied, almost from its beginnings, by the conviction that there is room for a common path for us and for the Arab States achieving their liberation, and that any clash between the two is bound, in the long run, to be but a fleeting episode in the annals of the nations.

If we try to sum up our peace plan as it has been articulated in our statements, hopes and actions, we should say, first of all, that the foundation of it is full respect for the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of all the States in the region.

From the juridical point of view, the effort for peace in the region is anchored to two international obligations, one general and the other specific. The general obligation is the duty accepted by all member-States of the United Nations to live with each other in peace and good neighbourliness, to unite their forces for the maintenance of peace and security in the world, and to refrain from the threat or use of force against the independence or territorial integrity of any State. I am quoting from the United Nations Charter, which both we and the Arab States signed.

There is, however, a second obligation in the Armistice Agreements of 1949. These lay down that they constitute a transition stage towards permanent peace. We propose, therefore, that direct negotiations be conducted between Israel and the states that signed the Agreements with us, to replace them by pacts of peace.

The peace settlement will be made on the basis of Israel as it is. Today, the States that signed the Agreements have crystallized the patterns of their lives and developmental undertakings behind the existing borders. The Arab-speaking States extend over an area of eleven-and-a-half-million square kilometres and, generally speaking, are thinly populated. The four Arab States which have borders with us alone extend over an area of a million-two-hundred-thousand square kilometres, and Israel has only a sixtieth part of the area in their possession, in other words, slightly more than 1.5 per cent—twenty-one-thousand square kilometres. In this situation, there is neither sense nor justice in territorial changes to Israel's disadvantage, and there exists neither power nor possibility, juridical or practical, to carry them out.

Historic Rights

And this without saying a word on the fundamental and natural historic rights of the Jewish people to its Land, to its only Homeland, from which it was expelled by brute force. To this Land it has lifted up its heart and its prayers during the years of Exile. In every generation, throughout the tribulations of epochs and regimes, its sons have come forward, braving hardship and suffering, to settle on its soil. Through the Land it has preserved—alone among all contemporary nations—its distinctiveness and its existence. Never has the Jewish people abandoned its Land, never has that Land been devoid of a Jewish population. In recent generations, the Jewish people dedicated itself to the task of safeguarding its rights to its Homeland under the law of nations. Through its toil and sacrifice, and with the support of humanity's finest sons, after the most appalling of history's tragedies, the State of Israel arose in a partitioned Land of Israel.

In this heritage, and within these boundaries, we shall do all

we can, and more, to gather in the scattered sons of our people and to unveil anew the light of our genius.

There may, indeed, be minor border adjustments, mutual and agreed, at certain points where there are hindrances to the daily pursuits of the populations.

Programme for Peace

But this is the rule: peace comes to change relations between States, but not to change the States themselves.

First of all, this applies to the express obligation to refrain from all aggression. We give warning against the aggressiveness of certain Arab rulers, and we can point to threats of aggression, and to planning for aggression, on their side. On the other hand, any Arab who proclaims a fear of aggression on our part is simply a victim of propaganda—if he is not one of those who, in the Talmudic phrase, 'know the truth and seek to rebel against it'. One way or the other, by all means let there be a *mutual* undertaking to refrain from aggression, so that our justified apprehensions and vain Arab fears may be dissipated at one and the same time.

Once peace is assured, we shall all be free to enjoy its rewards, and they can be most important in many fields. First of all, let it be pointed out that the State of Israel stands at the crossroads of Asia and Africa. If the entire region becomes an open area, dedicated to co-operation and mutual aid, that will be a blessing to the peoples of both Continents, and, among them, to ourselves and the Arab States as well.

Orderly land transport by road and rail; freedom of transit through airports; radio, telephonic and postal communications; access to our ports on the Mediterranean in the form of free areas in them, under suitable conditions, for the benefit of Jordan, which has no outlet to that sea; facilities for the sale of oil by reviving the oil pipeline or building larger ones; encouragement of tourism to all the lands of the area; free access to the Holy Places with amenities for religious pilgrimage to centres sacred to all religions—all these are only part of the picture that will take shape as the outcome of the liberation of the Middle East from the oppressive atmosphere that now prevails.

Regular processes of trade will be instituted; patterns of economic co-operation will be worked out on the basis of the experience acquired in other parts of the world. There is room for joint exploitation of raw materials through extraction and marketing, and for joint research on the problem of water desalination which engages certain of the countries in the region. Let us work together to make arid areas fertile; let us co-operate in conquering disease, in medical and agricultural research; let us strive side by side to utilize new sources of energy, for mutual cultural and scientific productivity, in the broadest sense of the term.

A climate of negotiation for peace will, of course, enable us to act together in restraint of the arms race and to cut down armaments in the region. The States there cannot but benefit from reliable arrangements for the limitation of armaments under mutual control; all of them will be able to divert tremendous financial and human resources, now used for purposes of war, to the development of their economic and scientific potential and the diminution of the need for external aid.

The Refugee Issue

The vast assets which will be released in that way will also largely facilitate the completion of the resettlement and absorption of the Arab refugees in their natural national environment: namely, in the Arab States, with their extensive territories and wealth of water, but sorely in need of development and, to take part in that development, of people who are their brothers and sisters in nationality, language and customs, in outlook and faith.

Israel is prepared to help financially, to the best of its ability, and with the aid of the great Powers, in this work of settlement and rehabilitation. Let it be remembered that the flight of the Arabs from Israel was devised by a leadership which had planted in their hearts the hope that they would return after we had been destroyed by the invading armies. Nevertheless, Israel has never ignored the human needs of those who uprooted themselves from their former abodes, whatever their motives might have been. The settlement of the refugees in the Arab States is the only solution consonant with their true interest, as well as ours.

In a similar way, in a natural national environment, Israel has absorbed Jewish refugees from Arab countries to a total not less than the number of Arab refugees who left our territory, and, from the legal point of view, it has thus perhaps already fulfilled its obligation.

This programme for peace is no fantasy. I do not imagine that the co-operation which exists today in Western Europe, for example, seemed less fantastic as little as twenty years ago. We are approaching the end of a score of years since the War of Independence. It can be done here too.

I have not touched on all the questions involved in a peace settlement. I have not enumerated all the boons such a settlement would imply, or, indeed, all the problems that are liable to arise. Our world knows many forms of productive co-operation between independent and distinctive States, in mutual respect for each other's sovereignty and integrity. It is the debate that has come out into the open on the other side, the recognition that a readiness to think about co-existence, about life side by side, is beginning to take shape there, that led me to outline a few basic principles and to voice the hope that my words will find an echo sooner or later—I hope, not too late.

The beginning of wisdom is the courage to free oneself from the self-hypnosis of hate propaganda, to sit down at the conference table without prior conditions and in full mutual respect, to start spinning the thread from the point where the Armistice Agreements left off—and the benefits will follow.

Nasser's Role In the Middle East

Meanwhile, as I said at the outset—we are not yet living in a situation that permits us to slacken our security and political efforts. I am confident that, so long as there is no basic change in the situation, we shall be able to meet the obligations it lays upon us. For the time being, the arming of the Arab States is being intensified; we must take the gravest view of it, and draw conclusions with regard to the building up of our own strength. When Arab States, whichever they be, augment their military potential, whether with the express purpose of attacking us or out of a wish to defend themselves against Nasserist domination,

we must not ignore the possibility that, in a certain political constellation, any Arab force in the neighbourhood of our frontiers might be used to our harm.

Arab apprehensions of Nasser are, indeed, legitimate, as the Yemen has proved. Nor has Nasser refrained from subversive activity in other countries of the area, if in less open fashion. In the Yemen itself, after two-and-a-half years of war, there is, at the moment, no sign of an end to the fighting, either by military or by political means. The Egyptians are preparing to go on. They are mobilizing large reserves to reinforce their detested occupation army in Southern Arabia. They are continuing to seek a way into the hearts of the local tribesmen by using poison gas.

In Iraq, Nasser is playing a double game. While talking of his anxiety to see an end of the war against the Kurds, he gives Aref's regime aid in men and material.

At the same time, Egypt renews its radio war against Saudi Arabia, interferes in the elections in Sudan, brings pressure to bear on Libya, and engages in subversion in regions of Southern Arabia and the principalities of the Persian Gulf, in pursuit of the smell of oil.

A day will come when the Arab countries which are a target for his stratagems will realize that the true division is not between Israel and the Arabs but between lovers of peace and aggressors, and, when they realize this fact, they will draw the logical political inferences.

Consolidating International Position

Till that happens, we must strive to consolidate our position on the international scene, *pari passu* with our military potential and in support of it. I am happy to note the understanding I found during my visit to Britain of our problems, and the closer relations that have been established with the leaders of the British people.

In my talks with the British Prime Minister and his colleagues, I perceived that they are thoroughly conversant with the question of Israel and the Middle East, and I was made aware of an attitude of respect for the independence and integrity of all the States in the area, combined with a consciousness of the factors that are calculated to undermine stability.

I appreciate the clear attitude of principle adopted by Prime Minister Wilson as to the need to maintain a reasonable balance of armaments, as well as his statement on our national water project.

I also had an opportunity of meeting leaders of the Opposition and members of all parties in Parliament. Friendship for Israel prevails in all sections of the British public.

There has been a certain improvement in our relations with the countries of the European Economic Community. No comprehensive solution has yet been found to this problem, and only a comprehensive solution can satisfy us. But we have met with understanding of the importance of the problems of citrus and of the 'European product' for us, and we hope that the Council of Ministers will reach an affirmative decision in the light of the sympathetic approach of the experts in this connection.

Two Significant Events

I do not think I can end without mentioning the impression left by two events of recent days. One is the African delegations which took part in our Independence Day celebrations. This is a welcome harvest of friendship from the seed we have sown, and are still sowing, in a sincere effort of co-operation in these and other developing lands. Our capacity to co-operate with African, Asian and Latin-American countries in their development is always a source of pride and satisfaction, and it also has political significance in days of trial.

The second event is the opening of the Israel Museum. I cannot help feeling that this splendid edifice in Jerusalem, our capital, adds a dimension of depth to our cultural standing in the world, as the response of museums and Governments which have co-operated on the great occasion has demonstrated. Perhaps this is a suitable note on which to conclude, as an indication that political affairs should not be looked at in isolation from the total state of things in which we live—in matter and in spirit as well. For who is better able than the Jewish people, through the lessons of its history, to prize the decisive moment of spiritual factors?

At the opening ceremony, I defined what the Museum had done: an ingathering of the exiles in the realm of the spirit, the

introduction of the beauty of Japhet into the tents of She and the renewal of our covenant with the past. It is both distant and recent past that moulds our future being. When I spoke of the devotion of the Jewish people to its Land, and of its borders I could not but commence with the days of the Patriarchs, of the First and Second Temples. Nor did I forget the years of bitter Exile until the last dark days of holocaust and the present light of redemption. And if we come to speak of the renewal of our life in Masada, now revealing its secrets, we shall discover the root stock of Israel's heroism, and more: the finds of Masada combine the heritage of sword and scroll, and the deeds of the fathers with the sign of the sons.

And always we shall keep before our eyes the historic magnitude and meaning of all that we have gone through: the millennia of Jewry, two thousand years of freedom and two thousand years of hope.

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